

ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH
OF THE
ST. ALBANS
URBAN SANITARY DISTRICT,

FOR THE YEAR 1898.

BY
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TO THE MAYOR AND CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF
ST. ALBAN.

GENTLEMEN,

I beg to report that during the year 1898, there were 227 deaths within the City of St. Alban, as against 195 in 1897. Of these deaths 53 were in the parish of St. Alban, 87 in St. Peter's parish, 32 in St. Michael's, 7 in Sandridge, and 40 in the Union Workhouse. Of the deaths recorded 110 were of males and 117 of females.

Taking the population of the City, as estimated up to the middle of 1897, to be 15,500, this would give us a death rate of 14·6 per annum. But we have to take into consideration the fact that, of the 40 deaths which occurred in the Union Workhouse, 22 were of persons who did not belong to our City; that 5 of the 8 deaths in the hospital were of persons whose homes were in other districts; and that a little girl who died at a common lodging house was the child of a non-resident. Deducting these 28 cases, we get 199 as the corrected number of deaths, and 12·8 as the true death-rate. In 1897 the total death-rate was 13, and

the true death-rate 11·6, so that the report for last year is not quite so satisfactory. We must bear in mind, however, the lengthened period of exceedingly dry and very hot weather which we experienced during last Summer, and which was accompanied by a great deal of illness and a considerable increase in the mortality amongst us. I think, indeed, climatic causes are quite sufficient to account for the slight increase in the death-rate.

Of the total deaths 50 were of children under 1 year of age, giving us a death-rate for infants of 3·2, as against 2·6 for the previous year. Amongst children between 1 and 5 there were 10 deaths, as against 13 in 1897, and 84 deaths amongst persons of 65 years old and upwards, as against 81 for the year before. There were 25 deaths from various Zymotic diseases, viz.:—3 from Diphtheria, 5 from Measles, 1 from Whooping Cough, 1 from Erysipelas, 14 from Diarrhœa, and 1 from Influenza; giving us a Zymotic death-rate of 1·6, as against ·86 in 1897. Here we may note that the increased Zymotic death-rate is almost entirely due to an increased number of deaths from Diarrhœa, which was unusually prevalent last Summer amongst young children. There were 31 deaths from diseases of the Respiratory System, as against 30 in 1897; 42 from Heart Disease, as against 33; 28 from Diseases of the Nervous System, as against 22 in 1897. There were 16 deaths from Phthisis, and 3 deaths from other Tubercular Diseases, as against 15 and 6 respectively for the previous year, giving us a death-rate for Tubercle of 1·2, as against 1·4 in 1897. There were 13 deaths from Cancer as against 7 in 1897. There was an increase in the number of deaths amongst children under 1 year of age, a decrease in those between 1 and 5, and the number of deaths of persons over 65 was very slightly increased. The number of deaths from Nervous Diseases, from Diseases of the Heart, and from Cancer was over the average, while the deaths from Respiratory diseases and Phthisis were under the average.

An unusual number of deaths from Accident or Violence occurred during the year, there being no fewer than 8 cases of death from this cause. In the month of February a young woman aged 29, died from “Exhaustion, the result of burns caused by her setting fire to her clothes

whilst of unsound mind"; in April two men aged 32 and 48 respectively, died in the Hospital from injuries caused by "a waggon accidentally running over them," and a female child aged 14 months died in the Hospital from "the effect of burns accidentally received"; in May a man 59 years of age died in the Hospital from "fracture of the spine, accidentally caused by a fall from a stageing"; in November a man of 59 "committed suicide by throwing himself in front of a train on the Midland Railway"; and in December a man of 27 was "accidentally run over by a van attached to a traction engine, and died at the Hospital of the injuries so received," and a man of 65 also died at the Hospital from "the effect of scalds."

There were 12 inquests held during the year; one on a boy of 5 years old, who was found to have died of "Tubercular Meningitis"; another on a newly-born female infant, who was found dead in the garden of Vancouver House, the cause of death being considered to be "Want of attention at birth"; a third on a male infant of 4 months, who was found to have died of "Cardiac failure"; a fourth on a male infant aged 2 months, where the cause of death was considered to be "Convulsions caused by Rickets"; and the remaining 8 on the cases of death from Accident or Violence mentioned above.

There were 5 uncertified deaths:—one of a female aged 78, who was stated to have died of "Heart Disease"; another of a female child of 1 year who was said to have died of "Measles"; a third on a female infant of 2 months, the cause of whose death was said to be "Diarrhœa"; a fourth on a female infant aged 5 months, who was stated to have died of "Bronchitis"; and a fifth on a female infant of a day old who seems to have died of "Convulsions."

The death-rate in the different divisions of the City was as follows:—

St. Albans	-	-	11·1 per thousand.
St. Peter's	-	-	10·6 ,,
St. Michael's	-	-	15·6 ,,
Sandridge	-	-	14 ,,

During the past year there have been 377 births, 197 of males, and 180 of females. The excess of births over deaths was therefore 150. There were 117 births in the

parish of St. Alban, 183 in St. Peter's parish, 51 in St. Michael's, 21 in Sandridge, 4 in the Union Workhouse, and 1 in the Prison. Of these births 7 were illegitimate, and the proportion of illegitimate to legitimate births was therefore 21·2 per thousand registered births. Last year the proportion of illegitimate births was 42·6.

The birth-rate in the different divisions of the City was as follows :—

St. Albans	-	-	24·5 per thousand.
St. Peter's	-	-	22·3 „
St. Michael's	-	-	24·8 „
Sandridge	-	-	42·0 „

The rate of mortality amongst children under 1 year of age per 1,000 registered births was 132·9, considerably higher than it was during the previous year. This is to be accounted for by the exceptional heat of the weather last Summer, which was conducive to diarrhœa and other infantile maladies which carried off a considerable number of young children.

Under the Infectious Diseases (Notification) Act, 19 cases of Infectious Disease have been notified to me, viz. : 8 cases of Scarlet Fever, 5 cases of Diphtheria, and 6 cases of Erysipelas. This is very much better than 1897, when the total number of cases notified was 73. It is worthy of note that no case of Enteric or Typhoid Fever occurred during the year.

There were 5 Scarlet Fever cases and 1 case of Diphtheria admitted into the Sisters' Hospital.

During the first 6 months of the year no case of Scarlet Fever was notified. The first case occurred in Bernard Street in July. We could not trace the source of infection. This case was removed to the Sisters' Hospital, and the disease did not spread. In the end of September a case occurred in Thorpe Road which was treated at home. In this case also the source of infection was not discovered. In October four cases occurred in Cannon Street, Grange Street and Church Street, amongst children attending the Hatfield Road and Garden Fields Board Schools. Of these cases three were taken to the Sisters' Hospital. I visited both those Schools and examined the children. I found a boy in one of these schools residing in Church Street, whose symptoms were rather suspicious. As I could not

be quite certain that he had been suffering from Scarlet Fever, though I thought it highly probable, I sent him home and gave directions that he should be kept in the house for such period as I considered necessary. No further cases occurred. In November, the case of a young man residing in Alma Road was notified. He was taken to the Sisters' Hospital. As he was engaged in business in London all day, the disease was probably contracted out of St. Albans. On December 31st a very doubtful case was notified to me in Spicer Street.

Of the 5 cases of Diphtheria which were notified to me, 1 occurred in July, 1 in August, 2 in October, and 1 in November. One was a case imported from London, and the others occurred in different parts of the City, and were apparently unconnected. One of the cases was removed to the Sisters' Hospital. There were 3 deaths.

A certain number of cases of Influenza occurred at various times during the year, and one death is attributed to this cause in February.

A number of cases of Whooping Cough occurred in the latter half of the year, and one death occurred from this cause in September.

We had an epidemic of Measles during the Spring and early Summer, which was especially severe in St. Alban's parish and the neighbouring part of St. Peter's. It was introduced into the Workhouse, and a number of cases occurred there amongst the children. There was 1 death in February in the Union Workhouse; 3 in April, 2 in St. Albans, and 1 in St. Peter's; and 1 in June in St. Peter's. One of these children was 5 years old, and the others were all under 2 years of age. I would again urge upon you, as I have done in former years, the desirability of including Measles, if not Whooping Cough, amongst the diseases which are to be notified under the "Infectious Diseases (Notification) Act." Your Medical Officer, under these circumstances, would be informed of the earliest cases in an epidemic, and would be able to use appropriate means to prevent the disease from spreading.

Once more I would urge upon you the necessity of removing the Smallpox Hospital to some more suitable situation at a distance from any inhabited houses. Not only is it dangerously close to the Sisters' Hospital, but the ground in the immediate neighbourhood is likely before long to be used for building purposes.

In consequence of the New Vaccination Act, we have to trust mainly to isolation for our defence as a community against Smallpox, and it behoves us therefore as good citizens, to see that the defence is a good one, and that the isolation of any case which may be brought amongst us should be real and effective. We ought to make every preparation beforehand, as it will be too late to do much if we wait till the enemy is at our gates.

I really do hope that it will be found practicable before many months are over, to provide a proper Disinfecter at the Sisters' Hospital. I have urged this now for many years, in season and out of season, with all my strength, and though the matter has been discussed time after time, and thoroughly threshed out, and although the members of the Council are now, I believe, practically unanimous in considering that a Washington Lyons or other suitable steam Disinfecter be erected, yet through some cause or another the matter has been put off time after time, and we seem really at the present moment very little nearer the attainment of this object than we were when the matter was first mooted. It is a matter of the greatest importance, both as regards the efficiency of the Hospital, and in order that we may be able effectively to stamp out disease in private households, that we should have a ready and efficient means of disinfecting infected clothing. I would beg the Council therefore to see to this at once without any further unnecessary delay.

In spite of the extreme dryness of the past season, and the consequent scarcity of drinking water in many places, we in St. Albans have been blessed with a plentiful supply of pure water throughout the past year. I have analysed the water on several occasions, and have found it perfectly satisfactory. The extreme hardness of our water is the only disadvantage it possesses. Still I must say that I should be very pleased if the Corporation of St. Albans were able to purchase both Waterworks and Gasworks, if the Shareholders of these eminently profitable concerns were willing to sell on reasonable terms. This has been done in other places with great advantage to the consumers and benefit to the ratepayers. It is most desirable I think that every community should have the control of its own water supply. And it is also to be desired that the manufacture of gas should be under the control of the municipality.

The drainage of the City is carried out as usual in a thorough and efficient manner.

The subject of the Sewage Farm has been under the consideration of the Council for the greater part of the year. After thoroughly going into the matter and discussing the question exhaustively in all its bearings, it became evident that in view of our increasing population, and to provide for the necessities of the near future, it was necessary either to make arrangements for purchasing a considerable additional quantity of land, or to adopt some other method of dealing with the sewerage. It was at first thought that it would be necessary to obtain additional land, but this was found to involve the expenditure of a very considerable sum of money, not only for the purchase of the land, but also for suitably preparing it for the reception of sewage, and before going to such a large expense, the Council thought it desirable that some of its members should inspect several Sewage Farms, where the Bacteriological System of Sewage disposal was being adopted, and make a report. After receiving the report of this Sub-committee, and discussing the whole question thoroughly, the Council resolved to ask Mr. Dibdin, late Chemist to the London County Council, an eminent specialist in the Chemistry of Sewage Farms and the question of Sewage disposal, and the inventor of a System of Sewage disposal by biological treatment, to visit the Farm and report to them on the best method, in his opinion, under the circumstances of dealing with the St. Alban's Sewage. Mr. Dibdin visited the Farm in August, and assisted by Mr. Ford, the City Surveyor, prepared a Report in which he advised the construction of two experimental bacteriological tanks, and if they proved successful, he recommended the adoption of his biological system of sewage disposal. On receiving this report, after some discussion the Council resolved to follow Mr. Dibdin's advice. These experimental tanks are now in process of construction, and will very shortly be in use.

Should this experiment be successful, as there is every reason to hope, and should the Council finally decide to adopt the biological system of dealing with sewage, there is good reason to think that we shall be at the end of our difficulties as far as the Sewage Farm is concerned. The

expenditure necessitated by this system will be very much less, than that which would be required for the purchase and laying out of an adequate additional quantity of land, and the working expenses of the Sewage Farm will, it is expected, be considerably diminished.

During the past year, by the great liberality of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Woollam of Abbey Mills, a large piece of ground known as the "Clay Pits," close to Verulam Road, has been presented to the citizens of St. Albans as a playground for the boys and girls of our City. It is to be known as the "Victoria Playing Fields." The warmest thanks of the community are justly due to Mr. and Mrs. Woollam for their great generosity, and the kindly thoughtfulness which they have shown for the children of our own and succeeding generations. Not only will it benefit the children, but it is to the interests of all that some open spaces, for ever free from the encroachment of the builder, should be preserved within our City.

I am pleased to say that in consequence of the recommendation in my report for 1897, last Summer the Council took into consideration the propriety of making bye-laws for the regulation of Dairies and Cowsheds, and after thoroughly discussing the matter, Regulations under the Dairies and Cowsheds order of the Local Government Board, for prescribing and regulating the lighting, ventilation, air space, cleansing, draining and water supply of Cowsheds and Dairies, were made and approved of. These regulations were sent to the Local Government Board for their consideration and approval. On receiving the sanction of the Local Government Board, these regulations will come into force. It is a matter of the greatest importance that the health of the cows which supply our milk should be carefully looked after.

I have visited the common lodging houses in the City, and have found them fairly clean and well kept, and as far as I could make out, not over-crowded. I would call attention to the fact that at the "Goat" lodging house, where 36 persons are taken in, there is no water laid on to the urinal, and there is only one w.c. for the use of both sexes. I think it very desirable that an automatic flushing tank should be attached to the urinal, and an additional w.c. constructed, so as to provide separate accommodation for the use of males and females.

I must again urge the desirability of removing ashes and refuse from every house at least two or three times a week. If this is not done, especially in the Summer, the organic matter which household refuse contains will be liable to ferment and putrify, and may cause a serious nuisance as well as considerable injury to health. Galvanised iron pails should be used with a properly fitting metallic cover. It is also desirable that dust carts should be provided with a cover in order to prevent the diffusion into the air of particles of dust which may possibly come from some fever stricken household and scatter infection broadcast.

I have inspected all the bakehouses throughout the city, and find them on the whole in a satisfactory condition. Several of them, however, are situated in cellars underground. I should like to see all underground bakehouses done away with, as they are always more or less damp, unwholesome, and difficult to ventilate properly, and therefore prejudicial to the health of the persons who work in them.

I have visited all the slaughter houses in the City, and have found them on the whole in as satisfactory a state as their structure and situation will allow. I must say, however, that I was obliged to find fault with one or two of them which were not kept as clean as they ought to have been. Most of the slaughter houses are in populous neighbourhoods and in close proximity to dwelling houses, and in such situations must cause annoyance to the neighbouring householders, and if the most scrupulous care be not taken, become actually dangerous to health. I would recommend you once more, in the interests of the public health, to erect a public abattoir in a suitable situation, which would be under the direct supervision and control of your own officers.

I would ask the Council to bear in mind the desirability of extending the City boundaries when practicable, especially in the direction of Hatfield Road and Bernard's Heath. We have populous districts springing up in those localities outside the limits of the City. The houses in these districts are being drained into cess-pools, and these cess-pools in many instances are simply holes in the ground which allow the liquid matter to percolate freely downward. And it is quite possible that our drinking water might

in this way become contaminated. It is therefore most important for us that these districts should be brought under our own control.

We have heard a good deal lately about the prevention of Consumption and other forms of Tuberculosis, and the efforts which are being made by certain eminent physicians and others to attain that end. As you are doubtless aware Consumption is now known to be an infectious disease produced by a minute organism called a bacillus. These bacilli are present, often in large quantities, in the expectoration and other discharges of tubercular persons, and becoming dried may be carried about in the air as dust, and when inhaled or swallowed, may excite the disease in susceptible individuals. It is therefore highly important in order to check the spread of this disease, that we should destroy these bacilli as far as possible. This can be done by disinfection. In addition to the use of disinfectants during the illness, which we must leave in the hands of the medical attendants, it is, I think, very desirable when a person dies of Tubercular disease, that the premises where the death has occurred and the infected bedding should be thoroughly and efficiently disinfected. I would therefore ask you to direct the Registrar of Deaths to inform me immediately of any death which he registers as occurring from any Tubercular disease, and I will then tell the Inspector of Nuisances to visit the premises and see that the necessary disinfection is carried out.

I have visited all the various parts of the City during the year, and inspected the markets on several occasions, but have found nothing to call for special comment.

I beg to thank his Worship the Mayor and all the members of the Council for the courtesy and consideration which they have invariably shown me during the past year.

My best thanks are also due to the Inspector of Nuisances and all the other City Officials for their valuable assistance and willing co-operation.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your most Obedient Servant,

JOHN MORISON,

M.D. Edin. D.P.H. Cantab.,

Medical Officer of Health.

February 13th, 1899.